



AMA demands change in drug advertisements

The American Medical Association is to ask drug manufacturers to insert a statement into all its direct to consumer advertisements saying: "Your physician may recommend other appropriate treatments."

Direct to consumer advertising of drugs has been blamed for adding to the steep rise in healthcare costs (*BMJ* 2000;321:783). But although drug firms like being able to advertise direct to the public, they have been resisting efforts to make allergy drugs available over the counter. A panel of the Food and Drug Administration recently voted that three remedies, including fexofenadine (Allegra), were safe enough to be sold without a doctor's prescription (26 May, p 1270).

Fred Charatan *Florida*

Public inquiry hears how Shipman killed patients with diamorphine

Clare Dyer *legal correspondent, BMJ*

The former GP, Harold Shipman, Britain's most prolific serial killer, used massive doses of diamorphine to kill his victims, the public inquiry into his patients' deaths was told as it got under way last week.

The inquiry, at Manchester town hall, chaired by High Court judge Dame Janet Smith, is expected to take two years to unravel how the GP was able to evade the authorities for 24 years while killing hundreds of his patients.

Shipman, serving life in Frankland prison, Durham, after being found guilty last year of murdering 15 women patients, has refused to cooperate with the inquiry. It will try to establish how 459 patients died, although this may not be the full toll.

Richard Lissack QC, representing victims' families, said that the GP had "moved unchecked through families, streets, and bit by bit murdered the heart of a community."

Shipman, practising in Hyde, Greater Manchester, was unmasked after he was named

as the sole beneficiary of the will of Kathleen Grundy, an elderly patient who was fit and healthy but had died suddenly during a visit to her home by Shipman.

Warning bells had been sounded at various stages of his career, but he had managed to escape detection. In 1975, in his first year in general practice in Todmorden, West Yorkshire, police and Home Office inspectors first became suspicious about the amounts of pethidine that he was obtaining. After several denials, he eventually admitted taking it intravenously for depression.

He was convicted on drugs charges in 1976 and entered a clinic to overcome his addiction. He had given a written undertaking in 1975 that he had no intention to return to general practice. But two years later he was back in practice.

The General Medical Council decided not to take action against him after receiving a psychiatrist's report that said it would be "catastrophic" if he were not allowed to return to practice. □

Ban on human reproductive cloning demanded

Susan Mayor *London*

The Royal Society—an independent body of scientists in the United Kingdom—has called for an international moratorium on human reproductive cloning, in a report published last week.

The report was prepared in response to queries raised by the ongoing inquiry by the House of Lords ad hoc committee on stem cell research.

Richard Gardner, Henry Dale research professor of the Royal Society, University of Oxford, chaired the working group that prepared the society's evidence.

"There has been a lot of unchallenged publicity this year for groups who claim that they will

clone human beings in the next few years," he said. "It is the Royal Society's view that this would be unethical and that responsible scientists across the world should not ignore the public's well founded opposition to such research."

The society's report outlined the scientific arguments against human reproductive cloning, explaining that the technique is ineffective (only a 1% success rate in mammals) and unpredictable and results in a high percentage of fetal deaths.

It pointed out that the great majority of nuclear transplants (cloned embryos) develop abnormally, with the very real danger of creating seriously handicapped individuals. The group is supporting legislation to ban human cloning in the United Kingdom and hopes that this will influence policies in other countries.

"A number of other countries have great respect for the UK regulatory system in this field and aim to modify their laws accordingly," said Professor Gardner.

He considered that an international moratorium on human reproductive cloning would have to be voluntary. However, the European parliament's committee on human genetics is currently considering the issue at a European level.

The Royal Society supported the continuation of research on stem cells and therapeutic

cloning, considering that these offer important benefits for society. There has been some debate about whether embryonic stem cells are still needed, after promising results with adult stem cells, but the working group argued that the different stem cell sources are not alternatives to each other and all should be further researched. □

Terminology used in cloning

Therapeutic cloning involves removing the mother's genetic information from an egg and replacing it with the DNA from a body cell from another adult. The egg is then activated to develop to the stage where embryonic stem cell lines can be developed but not allowed to develop into a fetus. These stem cells will be genetically identical to the adult.

Reproductive cloning entails the removal of the genetic material from an egg and replacing it with the nucleus from another adult's cell. The egg would then be activated and allowed to develop right through to the embryo stage and on to a new individual. The resulting animal or person would have exactly the same nuclear DNA as the adult who donated the nucleus. This has been achieved in animals—for example, Dolly the sheep—but not in humans.